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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: LIBERALS ON LIFE UNDER MEDVEDEV, THE NATO SUMMIT,  
POSSIBLE PERSONNEL CHANGES

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a series of recent meetings, traditional SPS patron and UES Chairman Chubais, beleaguered Yabloko Chairman Yavlinskiy, and radio station Ekho Moskvyy Editor Venediktov described a MAP for Ukraine as a "major strategic mistake," but thought that Putin's intention in Bucharest remained to turn the page on his 2007 Munich speech. None knew what the future held in store for potential cabinet re-shuffles and the operation of the Medvedev - Putin tandem, but were cautiously optimistic about a Medvedev presidency, as well as about the medium-term prospects for a somewhat improved climate for freedom of speech and assembly now that the Kremlin had accomplished its succession scenario. Yavlinskiy was defiant in the face of an open schism in his party and the backlash, among traditionally western-leaning commentators, to his March 11, two-hour meeting with Putin. End summary.

Ukraine MAP A "Mistake"

¶2. (C) In a series of recent meetings with the Ambassador and Embassy officials, RAO UES Chairman Anatoliy Chubais, UES colleague and Union of Right Forces Deputy Chairman Leonid Gozman, and Yaboloko President Grigoriy Yavlinskiy argued that a NATO offer of MAP to Ukraine would, in the Russian estimation, be a "major strategic mistake." Chubais, with Gozman nodding agreement, thought that a MAP for Georgia would be a mistake, as well, but saved most of his unhappiness for a possible offer to Ukraine. Yavlinskiy reiterated concerns that by frontloading its agenda with President-elect Medvedev with issues such as Kosovo and MAP, the U.S. was poisoning a strategic relationship, whose strength was paramount on a host of international challenges.

¶3. (C) Chubais had been heartened by what he had heard and read of the recent Moscow 2 plus 2 talks, which he described as "qualitatively different" from previous rounds. He hoped that the positive momentum established would continue through further rounds. Chubais told the Ambassador that Putin's intention at Bucharest was "not to replay (his 2007 speech at) Munich," but to turn the page for incoming President Medvedev. Of course, if Ukraine is offered MAP, then Putin's speech would undoubtedly be more strident, and that would trigger "huge problems in our relationship."

The Putin - Medvedev Tandem

¶4. (C) Chubais told the Ambassador that he had a high opinion of President-elect Medvedev, and that it would be a "mistake" to underestimate him as he begins his presidency. Chubais did not pretend to know what form the Putin - Medvedev power-sharing arrangement would take, but he doubted that

anyone did. Putin was more of a tactician, and Chubais described Putin's treatment of the succession as characteristic. In his telling, Putin initially had been serious about Prime Minister Zubkov as a potential successor, but when the elites had reacted poorly to Zubkov's candidacy, Putin had been agile enough to adjust. If it were a "yes" man he wanted, Chubais pointed out, Putin could have picked Zubkov, but he was clearly after something more. Chubais did not claim to know what Putin's endgame was in this instance. He cautioned against attaching too much importance to statements by leading politicians about cloudless prospects for the Putin - Medvedev tandem. For his part, Yavlinskiy stated flatly that "Medvedev is a third term for Putin," and refused to be drawn out on the policy differences that could emerge on Medvedev's watch.

#### Government Re-shuffle

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15. (C) Although Chubais, again, said that he had no inside knowledge, he told the Ambassador that he expected no major changes in the Cabinet or Presidential Administration. He thought that Minister of Finance Kudrin and Presidential Administration Deputy Igor Shuvalov would stay, as would Presidential Administration expert Arkadiy Dvorkovich. Chubais had less light to shed on the political and siloviki side of the Cabinet, although he joined others in telling the Ambassador that Aleksandr Voloshin hoped to return to the Presidential Administration under Medvedev. Ekho Moskvii Editor Aleksey Venediktov disagreed, arguing that Voloshin would remain outside the government framework, while retaining significant influence with both Medvedev and Putin.

Voloshin's one-on-one, two-hour meeting with Putin, Venediktov said, was focused on how to construct a "tandem" government but, like Chubais, Venediktov said that no one yet knew the outcome. Venediktov predicted the splitting of the

energy ministries, the creation of more deputy prime minister slots, and the potential elevation of Sergey Ivanov to a "state secretary" position that would have greater responsibilities than his current First Deputy Prime Minister role. Any re-shuffling, Venediktov stressed, would be a "package deal" and the permutations were endless.

#### A More Liberal Political Climate?

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16. (C) Chubais ascribed the recent crackdowns on the likes of St. Petersburg Yabloko's Maksim Reznik to the local administration's slowness in getting out of electoral gear. He thought that would change, and saw in the decision to re-open St. Petersburg's European University a sign that common sense was prevailing. Chubais and Gozman professed not to know the cause for the recent decision by St. Petersburg authorities to inspect local SPS headquarters, although they suspected that local conflicts, and the decision of some in SPS, like Chairman Nikita Belykh and former Deputy Chairman Boris Nemtsov, to harden their opposition to the GOR. As another, very slight glimmer of positive change, Venediktov acknowledged nighttime television programming was becoming more interesting and lively, the overt pressure against Ekho of three months ago had receded significantly, and technology continued to outstrip the authoritarian impulse of the government: internet, blogging, satellite television were moving faster than the authorities.

The fact that Medvedev read the internet first thing in the morning sent a powerful signal of change, compared to Putin's reliance on security services-drafted "folders," and indicated that the new president would seek alternate sources of information. Establishment supporter and Public Chamber member Vyacheslav Nikonov separately agreed, telling a USAID delegation that the Kremlin would keep its two "weapons of mass destruction" -- the federal television channels -- while ignoring internet and newspapers.

17. (C) Yavlinskiy, whose March 11 meeting with Putin generated a backlash among opposition politicians and editorial writers, argued that there was a useful role to be

played by liberal forces during a period of authoritarian rule, but that did not include "useless" street protests that left the Russian public unmoved. Yavlinskiy, whose rejection of the St. Petersburg Yabloko branch's participation in Other Russia and other pan-opposition protests has led to an open schism in the party, maintained that it was not enough to simply criticize the government. The opposition needed to generate ideas and find entree into decisionmaking channels. Every "noisy" opposition movement had failed, he noted, either because of the inadequacy of their leaders (some of whom, he stressed, were or should be ideologically odious to any liberal) or the paucity of their ideology. Yavlinskiy attributed Putin's invitation to meet to the Russian President's implicit acknowledgment that the ten percent of Russian society represented by liberal parties was "the most important" in society. While Putin had "stolen" Yavlinskiy's votes and stripped his party of registration in key regions, he could not afford to ignore the constituents that Yavlinskiy and others represented. Yavlinskiy concluded that "I can 'speak truth to power' in the newspapers and on the internet, but if I want to have an effect and to influence policy, then I need to find a language to communicate with the government."

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